

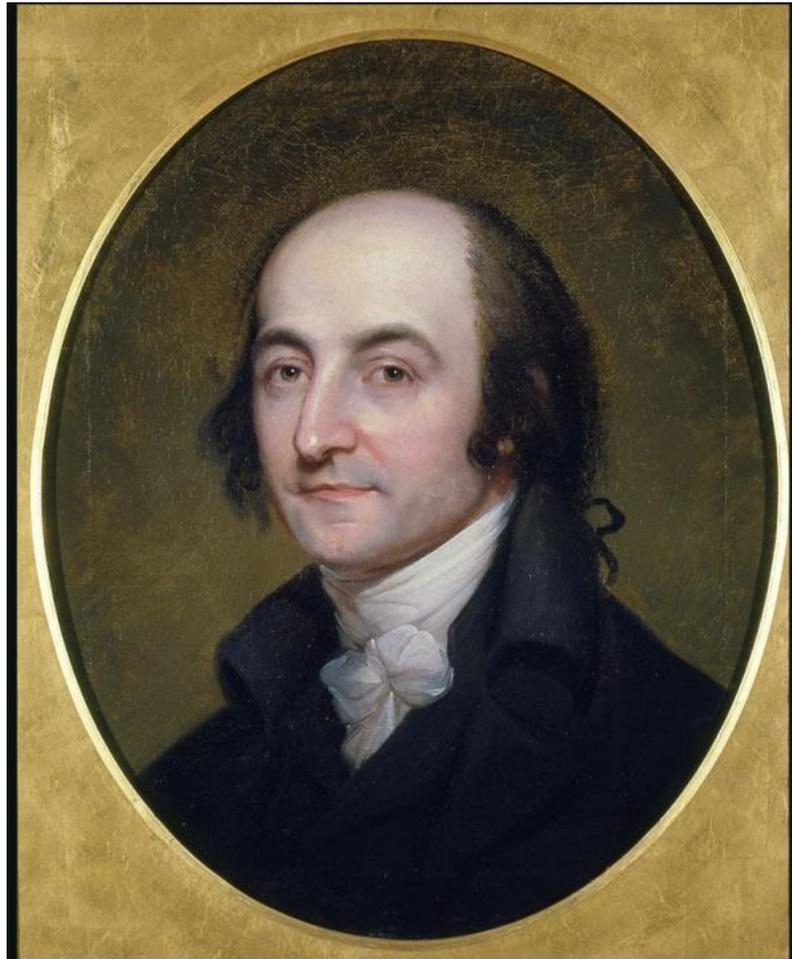
# Albert Gallatin: A Most Astonishing Man

Friendship Hill National Historic Site

## Teacher Background



## Background on Albert Gallatin



Albert Gallatin  
*Independence National Historical Park*

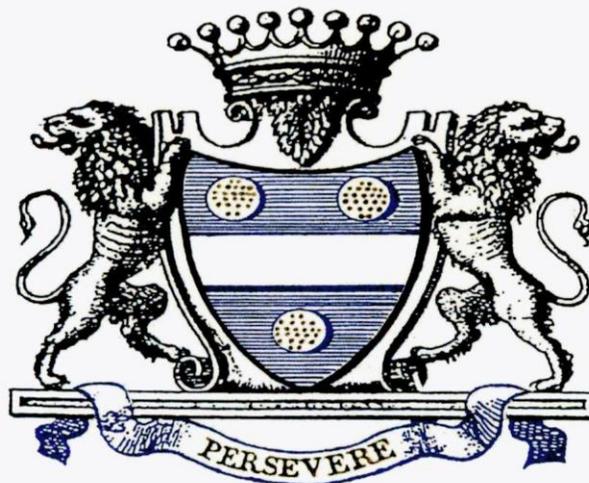
Of the approximately 300,000 Swiss and 30 million Europeans who, since the discovery of the New World, have crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of fortune or a better way of life, few experienced a more unexpected and brilliant fate than Albert Gallatin. Albert Gallatin (1761-1849) is to most people an obscure figure in American History. Instrumental in the Louisiana Purchase, friend and advisor to Thomas Jefferson, minister to Great Britain and France, and Secretary of the Treasury for twelve years, Gallatin's role during the formative years of the United State has been overshadowed by more colorful political personalities.

## Albert Gallatin's Early Years

Born in Geneva, Switzerland of an aristocratic family, Gallatin was orphaned at age nine and sent to live with a relative, Catherine Pictet. A rather austere woman, she did provide Gallatin with an excellent education, one that would serve him well throughout his many careers. A family trust, the Bourse Gallatin, enabled him to attend the Academy of Geneva where he studied classical languages, mathematics, natural philosophy, and science. Although his education was traditional, he was also influenced by such writers and philosophers as Rousseau and Voltaire. Indeed, Voltaire was acquainted with the Gallatin Family.

Gallatin's move to the United States had a less than promising beginning. Leaving Switzerland in 1780 with a classmate, but without informing his family, Gallatin arrived in America ready to try his luck as a tea merchant. This venture did not prove successful and in order to support himself, he accepted a tutoring position at Harvard College.

He soon left tutoring for the excitement of land speculation, forming a partnership with M. Savary de Valcoulon. The partnership was based, in part, on a shared dream of creating a new community combining the new freedoms of America and Republican principles. From 1783 to 1789, Gallatin worked as an agent and interpreter for their land schemes on the western frontier of Virginia and Pennsylvania. It was during this time, in 1784, that he met George Washington while Washington was inspecting western lands near present-day Morgantown, West Virginia, not far from present-day Friendship Hill National Historic Site.



Gallatin Coat of Arms

## Friendship Hill Purchased



Friendship Hill in 1786  
National Park Service

In December of 1785 Gallatin purchased a 370-acre tract he called Friendship Hill. He was already renting a dry-goods store at the mouth of nearby Georges Creek. At this time the surrounding countryside was still frontier country. Transportation was limited to river routes and primitive paths cutting across the mountains.

Although his intention was to create a home on this new site, the pull of politics kept him from living at Friendship Hill as much as he desired. During the three years following his purchase of the property, he traveled regularly between his western Pennsylvania home and the East.

Work on the brick house began sometime before 1789. It is to this house Gallatin brought his new bride, Sophia Allegre. Sophia's mother was very much opposed to the match and refused her daughter permission to marry. The couple eloped on May 14, 1789 and moved to Friendship Hill. Five months later, Sophia suddenly died of undetermined causes. She was buried in an unmarked grave. Gallatin was grief-stricken by her death. Perhaps Gallatin's involvement in state politics in the years following her death helped to ease his loss. Certainly it set a pattern for the rest of his life.

## Early Political Life

His interest in politics and especially the concerns of western Pennsylvania began even before his marriage. In 1788 Gallatin attended a conference convened in Harris' Ferry (Harrisburg) to amend the federal constitution. As an Anti-Federalist, Gallatin found the constitution "objectionable" and urged amendments be made to the document to include a bill of rights. Many of Gallatin's objections to the new U.S. Constitution would later become adopted by Congress as the U.S. Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

Shortly after Sophia's death, Gallatin was called to another convention. During the winter of 1789-90, he traveled to Philadelphia to assist in the writing of the constitution for the state of Pennsylvania. Following this, from 1790 to 1793 Gallatin served three terms in the Pennsylvania State Legislature as a representative of Fayette County. As an avid proponent of democratic government, he worked toward reform of the penal code, establishment of a state-wide system of public education, liberalization of land acquisition laws, and the abolition of slavery. He also served on the Ways and Means Committee and as a leader in financial legislation. Albert Gallatin was considered the "laboring oar" by both parties during his membership to the Pennsylvania State Assembly.



United States Bill of Rights  
National Archives

## Whiskey Rebellion



*Washington Reviewing the Western Army at  
Fort Cumberland, Maryland*  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)

Political unrest came to Fayette and neighboring counties with the passage of a federal excise tax in 1790. Gallatin had argued against the tax proposed by Alexander Hamilton as being too harsh on the frontier economy, but was unsuccessful in repealing the tax. The tax was on whiskey and stills, items that had become an integral part of frontier economy. The production of whiskey made good use of local rye and corn crops as it was cheaper to ship a gallon of whiskey distilled from several bushels of grains than the bulk grains. In addition, whiskey was often used in place of currency in an area of the country that was currency poor. Angered by the tax, local farmers and frontiersmen began to talk of secession and rebellion in 1794. Known as the Whiskey Rebellion, this was the first challenge to the national government and its new constitution. Gallatin spent weeks talking to the “rebels” urging compliance and moderation. By the time the army of 12,900 sent to crush the Rebellion arrived in western Pennsylvania, there was little left to subdue and the new government survived the challenge.

Gallatin moved from the state to national politics in 1793, being selected by the Pennsylvania State Legislature to serve in the United States Senate. However, controversy over his length of citizenship in the United States and his unpopularity with Hamilton and the Federalists resulted in the loss of his seat. At the height of the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794 he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. The election was declared void because the western counties were in a “state of insurrection.” In a special election in February 1795, Gallatin was once again the victor.

## **Marriage to Hannah Nicholson**

Although the demands of his legislative career and his work in the Whiskey Rebellion were time-consuming, Gallatin found time to meet and court Hannah Nicholson and to plan business ventures. After a brief courtship, Hannah and Albert were married on November 11, 1793. The daughter of James Nicholson, a prosperous New York merchant who had served as a commodore in the American Navy during the American Revolution, Hannah was a “city belle,” ill-prepared for the rigors of frontier life.

Even after several years of marriage, Gallatin noted in a letter dated July 11, 1799, Hannah “knows not how butter should be made, meat salted, vinegar prepared, cannot scold, first in bed at night and last in the morning.” He further stated his wife’s principal occupation was “to count the number of weeks and days which are to elapse before our departure, the number of days we may probably be on the road, and the identical minute on which we shall land on Long Island.”

While Hannah struggled with frontier life and eagerly counted the days between trips East, Gallatin divided his time between business projects and attending the Congressional sessions. After his election of 1795, he served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, began a partnership to found the community of New Geneva, and made time to complete an addition to his brick house, later called the frame house. Gallatin’s work in the House of Representatives proved to be more successful than the partnership. Perhaps his greatest accomplishments were in requiring reports of government expenses to the House and establishing the Ways and Means Committee.

## **Alien and Sedition Acts**

His political work brought him enemies as well as admirers. In a manner typical of a new, post-revolutionary government, the Federalists saw Gallatin, a leading Jeffersonian in the House, as a threat and attempted to silence him and many others through the Alien and Sedition Acts. These laws allowed the President to imprison or deport any alien deemed dangerous to American security. They also made it harder to acquire naturalization and prevent aliens from living in the United States in time of war. Gallatin spoke out against the Acts in Congress and was joined by others, including moderate Federalists. By 1802, none of the laws remained in effect and the Federalist Party had peacefully passed power to Jefferson’s opposition party.

## Albert Gallatin & Company, Founding of New Geneva



View of the town of New Geneva in the 1830  
National Park Service

His business ventures failed to leave an equal legacy. A partnership agreement signed on July 31, 1795 and revised in September 1795 created Albert Gallatin & Company. Comprised of Gallatin, his brother-in-law James Witter Nicholson, childhood friend Jean Badollet, Louis Bourdillon, and Charles A. Cazenove, the company began construction of a store, millhouses and a dam with the hopes of establishing the town of New Geneva around them. An economic depression in 1796 slowed the town's progress throughout 1796-97. The town received new hope with the arrival of five German glassmakers and the construction of a glassworks.

The glassworks was beset by problems, but by December 1798, it began to operate more smoothly. The first glass was made in January of 1798, making New Geneva glassworks one of the first to produce glass west of the Appalachian Mountains. It was many months before the glassworks operated at a profit.

The partners hoped not only for profits, but for new settlers as well. As the glassworks did not attract many new people to the area, new ventures were tried. In January 1799, Gallatin was able to obtain a contract to supply 2,000 muskets to the Pennsylvania state militia. The company was started in New Geneva that same year. Only 600 muskets were made in the first two years, and the contract for the remainder was turned over to Melchior Baker in 1801. Conflicts over this venture led to changes in the partnership. Badollet, Bourdillon, and Cazenove left the company by 1800. Albert Gallatin bought the company's remaining assets in 1803. James Nicholson served as Gallatin's acting deputy until 1803; he sold his shares in the company to Gallatin, but remained in New Geneva pursuing various businesses.

One of the reasons the New Geneva ventures failed was Gallatin's divided interests. They did fairly well whenever Gallatin was on hand to supervise, but

performed poorly whenever he was called back to Congress. He simply could not devote the time and energy needed to keep the ventures working smoothly while traveling back and forth. Ironically, while his personal finances suffered, recognition for his political financial skills grew.

## Secretary of the Treasury

In 1801 he was called away from New Geneva to serve as Thomas Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury. "The reduction of the Nation's Debt is certain the principal object into bringing me into National office," Gallatin wrote to his friend and political mentor, Thomas Jefferson. Gallatin viewed the national debt as a threat to the young Republic's future. Just as he was the "labor oar" in the State Assembly, so he was in Jefferson's Cabinet. Gallatin authored the majority of all Executive legislation during Jefferson's two presidential administrations.



"The Watch Dog of the Treasury", an old seal of the U.S. Treasury

# Louisiana Purchase



The large blank space on this map (which was commissioned by Gallatin and given to Meriwether Lewis to bring with him on the Lewis and Clark expedition) shows that little was known about the territory purchased in the Louisiana Purchase.

*Lewis and Clark map, with annotations in brown ink by Meriwether Lewis, Library of Congress*

Gallatin served as Secretary of the Treasury from 1801 to 1814, though he actually turned over his duties as Secretary after May 1813 to work on negotiations for the settling of the War of 1812. During his years as Secretary of the Treasury, he worked not only to reduce government spending, reform taxes, and balance the budget, but also to provide internal improvements such as the National Road. One of the greatest challenges as Secretary was the Louisiana Purchase. He had to provide the financial resources to assure the transfer of more than 800,000 square miles of land. The treaty for the Purchase was signed on April 30, 1803. The United States agreed to pay \$11.25 million for Louisiana and to assume the \$3.75 million in debt owed to American citizens by France. The Louisiana Purchase came at a cost of approximately \$188.00 per square mile. Gallatin met this challenge by adjusting plans for the reduction of the national debt and the use of surplus funds accumulated by the Treasury. Through his prudent planning the acquisition of Louisiana, which almost doubled the size of the nation, was accomplished without threatening economic stability.

## Lewis and Clark Expedition



Lewis and Clark on the Missouri River  
National Park Service

As a landowner whose properties bordered on the “western waters,” Gallatin shared the interest of other westerners in the navigation of the Mississippi River. But he also had a strong interest in the exploration and mapping of the territory for new scientific and natural history knowledge. He actively supported Jefferson’s plans for an expedition and drafted a list of suggestions, writing that “the great object is to ascertain whether from its extent and fertility that the country is susceptible of a large population in the same manner as the corresponding tract on the Ohio.” Gallatin met with Captain Meriwether Lewis several times to discuss scientific interests.

Gallatin’s interest and support were acknowledged during the course of the expedition by naming a river in his honor. In 1805 Lewis and Clark at the Three Forks of the Missouri River named the west fork Jefferson’s River, the middle fork Madison’s River, and the east fork Gallatin’s River.

## Treaty of Ghent



*The Signing the Treaty of Ghent, Christmas Eve, 1814*

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Sulgrave Institution of the U.S. and Great Britain

Nine years after the Louisiana Purchase, Gallatin faced another important challenge with the beginning of the War of 1812. As Secretary of Treasury he had grave concerns about the nation's financial stability and the impact of the war. In 1812 the United States was ill-prepared financially and militarily. Realizing that seeking enough funds to supply the military and maintain the government's affairs was an impossible task, Gallatin instead sought a way to end the conflict.

An opportunity arose through the offer by the Czar of Russia to act as a mediator for Great Britain and the United States. Although the British initially rejected the idea of negotiations, by November 1813 they agreed to meet with the Americans. The American delegation included Gallatin, John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, James Bayard, and Jonathan Russell. They met with the British officials in Ghent, Belgium.

The British sought specific concessions from the Americans on Indian rights, while the Americans sought the end of impressment. (The British insisted on the right to "impress" into service "British" citizens serving aboard American

vessels.) The final agreement merely re-established relations between the countries to their pre-war stage. Nonetheless, the war was considered by Americans to be an important victory, tantamount to a second war for Independence. It eliminated the Indian threat on the Northwestern frontier and European influence in American affairs, and inspired a new feeling of national sentiment.

Throughout the almost twelve months of negotiations, Gallatin remained a steady influence and was acknowledged by John Quincy Adams to have been the largest contributor to the Treaty of Ghent which was signed on December 24, 1814.

His diplomatic duties continued with his appointment as Minister to France in 1816. This appointment lasted until 1823. Writing in 1824, Gallatin described the years in France to his friend Jean Badollet as “the most pleasant and even most useful years of my life.”

## Return to Friendship Hill



Friendship Hill in 1824  
National Park Service

Gallatin began to anticipate his retirement from public affairs and a return to Friendship Hill. In 1821 he sent his youngest son, Albert Rolaz, back to Pennsylvania to oversee new building projects, specifically an addition to the house. His instructions to his son were fairly detailed and included directions on the placement of the doors, the height of the hearth and mantel pieces, and the planting and arranging of fruit trees, grapes, and shrubs for the garden.

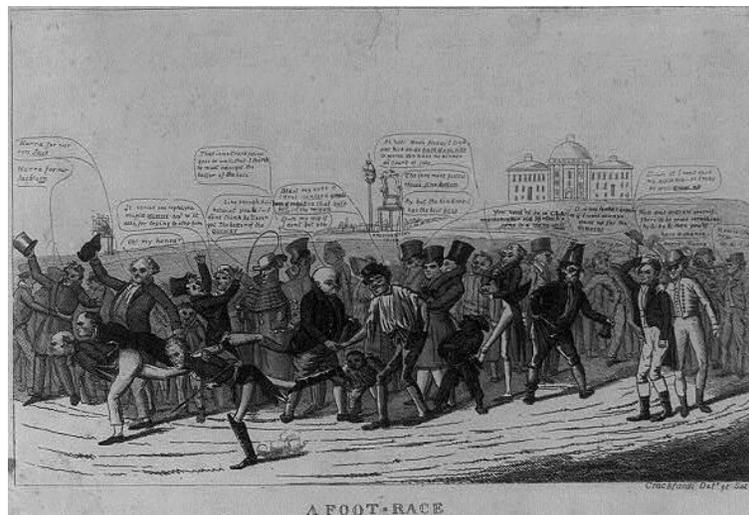
In August of 1823, Gallatin and his other son, James, joined Albert Rolaz at Friendship Hill. Hannah and daughter Frances remained in New York City for the winter. The elder Albert was less than pleased with the new construction and wrote to Frances:

Notwithstanding all my exertions, you will find it hard enough when you come next spring to accommodate yourself to the

privations and wildness of the country. Our house has been built by a new Irish carpenter, who was always head over heels and added much to the disorder inseparable from the building. Being unacquainted with the Grecian architecture, he adopted a Hyberno-teutonic style, so that the outside of the house, with its port hole-looking windows, has the appearance of Irish barracks, while the inside ornaments are similar to those of a Dutch tavern.

Actually, the Stone House addition, with its high ceilings, and ornate woodwork, was a more fitting home for an international statesman than the earlier structure. It expresses the values of a more conservative and mature Gallatin, one who would no longer be entirely at home in southwestern Pennsylvania in 1824.

In May 1824 the entire family moved to Friendship Hill and during the next eighteen months, Gallatin sought to enjoy the quiet, rustic life he had planned for so long. However, he found himself involved in the politics of the presidential election of 1824. He also actively pursued his growing interest in American Indians and their languages. His son, Albert Rolaz, shared his appreciation for the western country and sought a law career in Fayette County. The other family members found life too quiet. James and Frances returned to more active social lives in Baltimore after spending only a few months at Friendship Hill. Undoubtedly, Hannah Gallatin missed her children, friends, and city life as well. Her attempts to adjust to rural life were unsuccessful; in December 1824, she wrote to Frances, “alas, here we must remain, and my poor heart feels as if I was in Siberia, exiled from everything except my husband and child [Albert Rolaz].”



Election of 1824

Library of Congress LC-USC62-89572

## Marquis de Lafayette



Marquis de Lafayette  
Library of Congress LC-USZ61-226

By the spring of 1825 the entire family was in better spirits and enjoying life at Friendship Hill. On May 26 and 27, the Marquis de Lafayette visited the county named in his honor and also his friend at Friendship Hill. Albert Gallatin had become a close friend of Lafayette while serving as ambassador to France. Unfortunately, the interest of Gallatin's neighbors prevented the old friends from sharing many reminiscences. Indeed, Lafayette's secretary noted in his journal that while the visit had many charms, the general did not find "the solitude which his friend had promised him." He further noted "during the twenty-four hours which we remained at the delighted place, the doors remained open, to give free access to the good people of the neighborhood, who came in crowds to salute their well-loved guest."

## The Selling of Friendship Hill

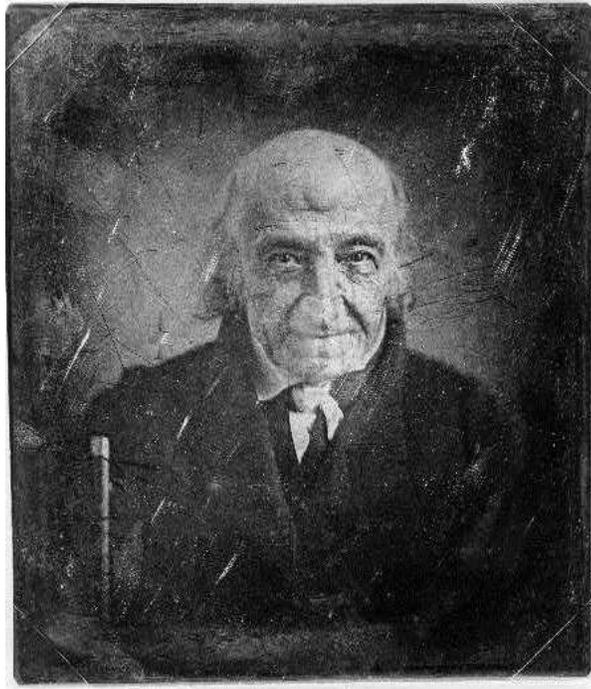


Friendship Hill in 1831  
National Park Service

The Gallatins left Friendship Hill in October of 1825 to live in the East. Gallatin retained ownership of the estate until 1832, but did not return to live there after 1825. During those years the estate was rented out and preparations made for its sale through the efforts of James, Albert Rolaz, and their uncle James Witter Nicholson. After several years of attempting to sell Friendship Hill, a purchaser was found in Albin Mellier, Jr. of Baltimore County, Maryland. The property was sold on May 26, 1832 for \$3,600, of which only half was ever paid. Several months later, Gallatin wrote to his old friend Badollet:

...although I should have been contented to live and die amongst the Monongahela hills, it must be acknowledged that, beyond the invaluable advantage or health, they afford either you or me but few intellectual or physical resources. Indeed, I do not know in the United States any spot which afforded less means to earn a bare subsistence for those who could not live by manual labor than the sequestered corner in which accident had first placed us...

## Gallatin's Later Years



Photograph of Albert Gallatin taken near the end of his life.

Library of Congress LC-USZ62-110017

If Gallatin's assessment of his home in Pennsylvania was grim, his contributions in politics, science, finance, and business attest to his abilities beyond the Monongahela hills. His diplomatic career ended with his work in Great Britain which included negotiating a settlement to the Canadian boundary dispute. He left Great Britain in 1827 and returned to New York City with his family. At the urging of his friend John Jacob Astor, he accepted the presidency of the National Bank of New York, later known as the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Bank, now known as J.P. Morgan Chase Bank.

He also became the first president of the council of the University of the City of New York, and in 1842, culminating a long-standing interest in American Indians, founded the American Ethnological Society. His book, *Synopsis*, a treatise on the classification of American Indian languages, remained a standard reference work for decades. Hannah Gallatin died in the spring of 1849; after several months of ill health, Albert Gallatin died on August 12, 1849. And so passed one of American's greatest patriots whose 68 years of public service, while appreciated, have almost become forgotten.

The National Park Service is dedicated to preserving the memory of Gallatin's many services and accomplishments through the preservation of his estate at Friendship Hill. Established in 1978, the park seeks to use the home and exhibits in the house's rooms to help visitors connect to the place the Gallatin loved so dearly. Park Rangers staff the building to help interpret the historic space and share with visitors the amazing story of Albert Gallatin's life and explain how this little-known patriot helped shape the pivotal moments in America's early history.



Sculpture at Friendship Hill National Historical Site of Albert Gallatin surveying  
National Park Service

## Albert Gallatin Timeline

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 1761      | Abraham Alphonse Albert Gallatin born on January 29 to an aristocratic family in Geneva.  |
| 1766      | Gallatin is sent to live with his relative, Catherine Pictet after the death of his father. A formal and frugal woman, Mlle Pictet raised young Gallatin until he began boarding school at age 12.  |
| 1775-1779 | Gallatin attends the College and Academy of Geneva.   |
| 1780      | Gallatin seeks adventure and a new life in America. He leaves for America with a friend, Henri Serre.   |
| 1784      | After attempts at selling tea, operating a store in Maine, tutoring French at Harvard and working as an interpreter, Gallatin begins to purchase and survey lands in Western Virginia and Pennsylvania.   |
| 1786      | Gallatin purchases the property of Friendship Hill.   |
| 1788      | Gallatin enters politics during the U.S. Constitution ratification controversy as an Anti-Federalist.   |
| 1789      | On May 14, Gallatin marries Sophia Allegre and moves to Friendship Hill. The Brick House is built. Sophia becomes ill and dies after only 5 months of marriage. Grief-stricken, Gallatin leaves Friendship Hill in the fall to serve as a delegate to the Pennsylvania State Constitutional Convention. |
| 1793      | Pennsylvania State Legislature selects Gallatin for the United States Senate, but a controversy over his qualifications costs him his seat. On November 11, he marries Hannah Nicholson, daughter of “Commodore” James Nicholson of New York.   |
| 1794      | Gallatin is called upon to serve as a Fayette County representative in the Whiskey Rebellion.   |
| 1795      | Gallatin is elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for the first of three successive terms. An agreement is signed to create Albert Gallatin & Co. by Gallatin, his brother-in-law James Nicholson, and three others. The company provided funds for the construction of the town of New Geneva.  |
| 1798      | The Frame House built and the Gallatin family spends time at Friendship Hill between Congressional sessions.  |
| 1801      | President Jefferson appoints Gallatin as Secretary of the Treasury, a position he will hold for nearly 13 years. During those years he makes important contributions to stabilizing the nation’s economy, including reducing the national debt.   |

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 1803      | The Louisiana Purchase  |
| 1804-1806 | The Corps of Discovery Expedition, also known as the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the first transcontinental expedition to the Pacific Coast.  |
| 1811      | Construction of the National Road commenced.  |
| 1813      | Concerns over the possible consequences of the War of 1812 prompts Gallatin to seek diplomatic solutions to the end of the conflict. He travels to Europe to encourage acceptance of the Czar of Russia's offer of mediation. The offer is refused by Great Britain, but direction negotiations begin a few months later. Gallatin is appointed to the American diplomatic team along with John Quincy Adams, Henry clay, James Bayard, and Jonathan Russell. |
| 1814      | Negotiations with Great Britain result in the Treaty of Ghent, signed on December 24 <sup>th</sup> .  |
| 1816      | President Madison appoints Gallatin as Minister to France and his wife and children join him in Paris. Gallatin serves as minister until 1823.  |
| 1821      | Anticipating retirement from public life, Gallatin sends his son, Albert Rolaz, to Friendship Hill to oversee construction and prepare the home for the family's return.  |
| 1824      | Gallatin and his family return to the United States. By May, the entire family is living at Friendship Hill. The next 18 months are pleasant ones for Gallatin. Unfortunately, only Albert Rolaz shares his father's enthusiasm for this home. Hannah, daughter Frances, and son James find Friendship Hill too quiet after life in Paris.  |
| 1825      | The Marquis de Lafayette visits Friendship Hill during his tour of the United States. The crowds, eager to view Lafayette, follow him to Friendship Hill and make a quiet visit impossible. The Gallatins leave Friendship Hill. The family owns the property for 6 more years, but never return to the site.   |
| 1826      | On May 8 <sup>th</sup> , Gallatin returns to diplomatic service as the U.S. Minister to Great Britain.  |
| 1831      | Gallatin is named president of the National Bank of New York. He also serves as the first president of the council of the University of the City of New York.   |
| 1832      | Friendship Hill is sold to Albin Mellier, Jr.   |
| 1842      | Gallatin continues his interest in studies of American Indians and founds the American Ethnological Society.  |
| 1849      | Hannah Gallatin dies on May 14 <sup>th</sup> . Albert Gallatin dies on August 12 <sup>th</sup> . Both are buried in Trinity Church yard, New York City.   |